

Written Copy: Luke 1:34-38 “Nothing Is Impossible with God”

4th Sunday in Advent

Sunday, December 19th, 2020

Text: Luke 1:34-38

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy---the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Exegetical Statement

This message from God through the angel Gabriel is linked from the beginning to Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy with John the Baptist by Luke telling us it takes place in the 6th month of her pregnancy. Luke also points out repeatedly that Mary is a virgin, betrothed to Joseph, but they have not yet consummated their relationship. Gabriel appears before Mary and addresses her as one who has already been highly favored by God, even before what is about to come, and that the Lord is with her. This greeting greatly troubles Mary, possibly partially because she is not one living a "favored" existence. She is not sure how she has been highly favored or what this could mean from here going forward. Along with that here is an angel appearing to her. Add to her not understanding what the greeting meant feelings of fear. Gabriel tells her to stop being afraid, that there is no reason to fear, because she has found unmitigated favor-grace-in the presence of God. And here is how that grace will be poured out on her: she will conceive in her womb and bring forth a son that is to be named Jesus. This son will be great, in fact He will be called the Son of the Most High God, and in addition He will receive the throne of David, making Him the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy to King David. Here Gabriel has identified this baby of Mary's as the human fulfillment of the Messiah, quoting the same prophetic description given to David in 2 Samuel 7, as well as having Divine origin. He will receive that promise to David that one of his descendants would rule over the house of Jacob and that His reign and rule would last forever. Unlike Zechariah who questioned in disbelief, Mary questions according to her knowledge of biology. Procreation happens when a man and women come together. She understands that this pregnancy will happen before Joseph takes her as his wife, so she wants to know if there is something she will have to do. The answer is that the Holy Spirit will do all the work. He will come upon her and overshadow her/envelop her. More than this is not explained and could not be understood by the human mind. But it will make the baby that comes forth from her the Son of God in human form. And given as a sign to help her, Gabriel tells her of another miracle, her relative Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy in her old age. The bottom line is whatever the Lord chooses to do and enact among men is never impossible, for all things are possible with God. Mary responds, speaking from faith, alluding to herself as a humble female slave of the Lord, that may everything described her about her happen exactly as it was told. With that the angel departs

Focus Statement:

All things planned, announced by God, and put into action will happen. There is nothing that God can't do. While man could never defeat sin, death, and the devil God could and did by taking up human flesh and being born as the God man. He fulfilled God's promise of sending a Messiah/Savior whose reign and rule is not dependent upon the pre-existence of a kingdom, but He makes His own kingdom and calls us to be a part of it through the work of this child born to Mary.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We take the virgin birth of Jesus as a historical fact without much thought, failing to ponder the supernatural mystery of it. And failing to let Gabriel's words impress upon our own lives that "nothing will be impossible with God". Whether we realize it or not we live as though God is in a box, that cancer, COVID-19 and other life problems are seemingly out of His control or beyond His caring about

What the hearer should do as a result:

We should never have a name it and claim it theology, whereby all have to do is demand something of God and He will do it if I have enough faith. And we should never put anything out of His reach or capability. What He does or does not do is based on what He knows is best for us, and not the limits of His power or love or grace

Subject Sentence: Nothing is beyond God's power, control, love, grace

Introduction: What “Impossible Thing” Has Happened To You?

There are things that seem impossible and rightly so. One of them I think many of us would agree on is the Lion's ever winning a Super Bowl. As Ron Jonas is fond of saying, “Still rebuilding since 1934” While they have won four Conference Championships, they are the oldest NFL franchise never to appear in the Super Bowl. They are the only franchise that's been operation ever since the Super Bowl began being played that has never made it to a single Super Bowl Contest. That qualifies them in the minds of many as an impossible shot to ever win the Super Bowl, or even play in it. For once I think Ron is right.

Has there ever been something in your life that you thought would never happen that did? Maybe it was a son or daughter that you thought would never get married, and all of a sudden, they show you the engagement ring. Maybe it's a couple who tried for so long to get pregnant and have a child, and then all of a sudden, you hear they're expecting. Maybe it's the child that doctors predicted would be born with severe handicaps only to have the baby born without any problems at all. Maybe it's the diagnosis of cancer or some other disease that miraculously disappears, and the doctors have no explanation as to how this could be.

We know miracles happen. And one of these things I mention could have happened to you. But generally it seems, miracles happen to someone else. We tend to view them as being few and far between. They may happen in other people's lives but not to us. But is that really how we should view miracles?

What Things In Your Life Seem “Not Possible”

What things in your life do you consider to be inevitable? The easy answer is: death and taxes. But are there things that we consider so unlikely that we place them in the category of “Not Possible”.

Now just to be clear this is not a “Name it and Claim it” sermon. I'm not saying that if you pray hard enough, or live a good enough life, or claim a spiritual promise of wealth or health, and that, if you really believe it, it will come true. God will fulfill all His plans and purposes in our lives and the lives of all people, whether they are believers or unbelievers. And He will do so according to His will and plan, not yours or mine. And while God always answers the Christian's prayer, that answer is sometimes: “No”. For us as Christians the “No” answer is not based on our lack of good works or favor with God. We stand before Him all as sinners undeserving of anything. And all that He gives us is by His grace, His undeserved favor that He pours out on us because He loves us.

But what about those things we fear. Why do we fear them? Perhaps it's because whether we are willing to admit it or not, we can see them as either beyond God's control, or beyond His loving care for us. Or we might see Him as taking care of these things in other people's lives but not in ours. Maybe it's because we think He either loves them more than us, or maybe we feel that there's a limit to the number of miracles He will perform at any given time. Perhaps we've never thought deep enough about it to even consider the reason why. We just know that "for me" this is so unlikely it is impossible. What might some of those things be? For some it's the hope of ever finding a spouse. For others it's being cured of cancer or some other disease or affliction. For many it's COVID-19 which many today regard as the unseen enemy that is out to get us. We see it as closing in on us, creeping closer and closer as those we know around us contract it, and as some of those we know die from it, or from complications brought on by it. Do you feel that it's impossible to avoid COVID-19 infection, that's it inevitable? That it's impossible to survive it? Somewhere in the back of your mind do you feel that some of the things that happen in your life are out of God's hands?

Gabriel Announces How All Things Are Possible

What if we could go back in time and ask Mary about things that are possible or impossible? More specifically, what if I were to go back the day before the angel Gabriel came to her and asked her, "Mary, what's the chance of you becoming pregnant while still remaining a virgin?" The first thing she might do is slap me across the face for even bringing up the subject. Then she would look at me as being some kind of idiot, and rightly so. There's only one way to become pregnant, and it's not by remaining a virgin. But what about after the angel's visit? Well, that's a differing story isn't it? The visit by the angel Gabriel changed everything.

God the Father sent Gabriel on a specific mission to Mary. But why Mary? She is just your average maiden from the backwater town of Nazareth, not a town anyone would brag about being from. As the disciple Nathaniel would say before Jesus called him (**John 1:46**) "**Can anything good come out of Nazareth?**" If you or I were in charge of the mission to find a suitable mother for the Christ child would we pick Mary of Nazareth? We would look at all of the candidates available including, who is the most faithful, most deserving, best suited, who worthy of such an honor as to raise the Son of God. Someone perhaps the lives in a palace that has the means to provide the child with a proper upbringing. Not Mary from that backwater town of Nazareth. But that's not what God did.

God picked Mary for this most worthy task even before she was born. **Luke 1:28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"** And **Luke 1:30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.** He calls Mary "O favored one" and that there is no reason for her to be afraid because she has found favor with God." Not will find, or is finding, but has found, past tense. And he calls her this before she has agreed to anything. It is not by chance that she lives in Nazareth, is

from the line of David, betrothed to a man also from the line of David, yet is not married and still a virgin at the time that is 6 months after her relative Elizabeth has become miraculously pregnant by the normal means while she is advanced in years. The LORD has had His eye on all the human players in the drama and has brought everything to this exact point at this exact time of His choosing. How can this be? **Because nothing is impossible for God.**

Then comes an even more amazing statement from angel Gabriel in **Luke 1:31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.** You Mary, having never known a man, having never indulged in the biological imperative that preceded the birth of the rest of us. Yet you, Mary, are going to bear a son. You and I could make a 50/50 guess on the "son" part, but the rest? That's all God!

Then Gabriel ramps it up even more by telling her **Luke 1:32-33** ³² **He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,** ³³ **and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."** Here we have the identity of the long-awaited Messiah revealed. He will be a man, conceived and born from Mary's womb. A man who is the fulfillment of the prophecy made to David in 2 Samuel 7 that the LORD would raise up one of David's descendants and place Him on the throne ruling over God's chosen people. His kingdom would have no limits and His reign would never end. How could God make such a specific claim to David 1000 years before it would actually come about?

Then there's the prophecy the LORD gave to Isaiah 700 years before Christ that the virgin would give birth to a son. And that son would be born according to **Isaiah 9:1-2** ^{1b} **the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.** ² **The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined."** How can this happen? It's not just a matter of God looking into the future. The LORD not only sees what will happen, He makes things happen to fulfill His will. **For nothing will be impossible with God.**

All this does sound unbelievable to human sensibility. And we do have Mary asking: **Luke 1:34 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"** A very good question from her point of view. But not so much a question springing from unbelief. Mary only knows one way that conception in the womb can happen. And she has not indulged in it. She understands that her conceiving this child will happen soon, before she and Joseph plan to consummate their betrothal on the marriage bed. Perhaps she is wondering if she needs to hurry Joseph along on this part. But that is not God's plan at all.

In the most amazing turn of events in **Luke 1:35 And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy---the Son of God.** Mary, you do nothing. The LORD will do everything. Joseph will not be the child's father. The Holy Spirit

will make it happen by coming upon you and overshadowing you, enveloping you with His mighty power. Enveloping you with the same power that first formed the whole universe and breathed the breath of life into Adam and Eve. The same power that brought the gift of life to each and every person. What exactly does this “overshadowing” mean. Gabriel does not explain any further. And for that matter we can’t really understand how exactly the living spirit comes to inhabit any child in the womb. All we need know is that it does. How can this be? **Luke 1:37 For nothing will be impossible with God.**"

How does that answer sit with Mary? **Luke 1:38 And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."** Mary doesn't need a detailed explanation to get on board with God's plan and purpose. She realizes He is the Lord Almighty, and she is simply His servant. As you have said O Lord, let it be so. This will change my life in ways I can only imagine, and in ways that are beyond my vision at this time. Not all those changes will be fun or pleasant. There will be the accusing glances by former friends and neighbors who think her unfaithful. The long ride to Bethlehem while very pregnant. But I am your servant. Let it be so. Notice that God didn't first ask her permission to go along with this. He simply told her what is about to happen. He didn't have to force her or threaten her. He knew she would willingly agree. How can this be? When it comes to His will being done "**Nothing will be impossible with God**"

All Things In Keeping With God's Will Are Possible

If you were Mary how would you have answered? Would you say to Gabriel “That’s impossible!” Or “I need more information.” What in your life are you unwittingly saying to God “That’s not possible”? Is it perhaps some healing that you need in your life? Is it an issue with your children that you don’t think will ever be resolved? Is it the threat of COVID? Deep down do you feel that God is unable to protect your life from being ended by it? Our God knows the day of your birth as well as the day of your death. Do you really think that COVID can sneak in unawares and steal you from Him?

He loves you so much He did all of these impossible things referenced in our Gospel reading for you, for your life. He did the impossible by creating a way that He could become a man in Jesus Christ. He did the impossible by taking upon Himself the sins of the whole world, of all people that ever lived, including your sin and my sin. And He died for them, to remove them forever from your record. No man could accomplish that unless He was also God. And God could not die, unless He became a man. And so He became a man and died on the cross for you. And this God Man was raised up on the 3rd day to open the door for you to live forever with Him in eternal life. And all these gifts were delivered to you in the most impossible way, by the Spirit of God coming upon you and doing a mighty miracle in your heart. The miracle that only God could do of creating faith in you, converting your heart to believe in Him.

He did all those things to fulfill His will, His plan, and His purpose for you. He did the impossible. Your life now and eternal life to come mean so much to Him. Do you think He would allow anything to come in the way of it? Do you think He would allow COVID to defeat His plans and purposes for you? The answer is absolutely not. **Romans 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.** All things: our problems, our diseases, even COVID-19, all things work together for the good of you and I who are called to faith in Him. It may not work out according to your definition of what is good in this life. What you consider good might actually work toward destroying your faith. Everything He allows works for your eternal good, the good of your life now in view of your eternal life to come. All things are possible, according not to my purpose, or your purpose, but according to His purpose, which is always for our eternal good.

Conclusion

Luke 1:37 For nothing will be impossible with God." Does that include the Lions winning the Super Bowl, or at least making it there? Well. No! That's not because God isn't powerful enough. God doesn't care about a pro sports team. He cares about the eternal welfare of the players and the fans. And He will make possible whatever serves His purpose of bringing those He calls to eternal life. What should this mean for you? Certainly, you should treasure your life as a gift from God. That means not taking unnecessary chances with your health or with COVID 19. It means being wise and following the advice of physicians and health care advocates. It means not seeing your Christian life as a "Name it and Claim it" affair. But should you be afraid that death will sneak up on you unawares? Should you see the Virus as beyond God's power? Should you hide away in fear that death could be around the corner? Or should you live your life as a servant of the Lord, as Mary did, confessing with your words and your actions that "**Nothing will be impossible with God**". Mary answered, "Let it be so according to Your word." What is your answer? Amen.